



The Sarajevo Sentinel

A newsletter for American citizens living, working, and visiting Bosnia and Herzegovina

Produced by the Consular Section of U.S. Embassy Sarajevo

SUMMER 2011

U.S. Embassy Sarajevo

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For after-hour emergencies, please call the Embassy switchboard.

For all telephone inquiries, please call us Monday through Friday between 3:30 and 4:30 p.m.

American Citizen Services

Business Hours:

Monday through Friday from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.;

Wednesdays and Fridays from 8:00 to 11:30 a.m.

**We can provide better service if you make an appointment at*

<http://sarajevo.usembassy.gov/service.html>

ACS e-mail: rws@state.gov

Non-Immigrant Visa Hours:

By appointment only.

Call Visa Information Service:

(387) 33 295 375

Immigrant Visa Hours:

By appointment only.

IVConsularSarajevo@state.gov

The Embassy will be closed:

30 August–Ramadan Bajram (BIH)

5 September –Labor Day (AM)

2011 EMBASSY HOLIDAYS

For a complete list of this year's holidays, please follow this link.

<http://sarajevo.usembassy.gov/holidays.html>

Sarajevo Crime & Security Environment

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is regarded as a relatively safe country. However, confrontational and violent crimes are becoming more common in its major cities and precautions applicable to any metropolis should be followed when walking at night. Vehicle theft (Audis and Volkswagens the most frequent targets) and theft from vehicles are the most common crimes committed against the American and international community with a recent increase in residential break-in attempts. Pick-pocketing, petty theft and other street crimes do occur in heavily trafficked pedestrian areas and are on the rise, but still are not as widespread as in other eastern European capitals.

Local Travel and Transportation Considerations



The use of taxis is considered safe and reliable. City buses and trams are often overcrowded and are known to attract pickpockets. There are also reports of more educated thieves who work the tramlines and target westerners to lure them into other scams after engaging them in conversation. Rail travel in Bosnia is usually avoided because it is slow,

has limited destinations, is dirty, and thefts have been reported.

Traveling long distances in BiH at night is not recommended due to inter-city road conditions and a lack of adequate emergency response. While current conditions in Bosnia are calm, localized political difficulties continue and random violence may occur with little or no warning.

Threat from Land Mines



BiH has a significant presence of landmines as a result of the conflict in the 1990s. Approximately 500 people have been killed by landmines since 1996. Current estimates indicate that there are between 500,000 and 1 million landmines and other UXO remaining in approximately 13,000 minefields throughout the country. The city of Sarajevo itself is ringed with mountains that contain known minefields, which mark former lines of confrontation. Only about 30 percent of minefields countrywide are clearly marked. De-mining experts recommend that people remain on paved or hard-packed surfaces. Any hiking or other outdoor activities should be done in officially cleared areas or with reputable guide companies.

Traffic Incidents



Poor road conditions, inclement weather, and inattentive drivers can make Sarajevo a challenging place to operate a vehicle. In case of an accident, it is important to remember to always carry a cell phone with you, stay with your vehicle and wait for police. Do not attempt to make an on-the-spot payoff to the other driver or exchange information and then drive off because the other driver may take advantage and report it as a hit and run. Take photos if possible and always be courteous regardless of perceived fault.

Crime Prevention

Residential



- The use of residential alarm systems is highly recommended. Ensure that your alarm is in working condition and use it every time you depart your residence and while at home. It may be the one time you plan to quickly run to the store for a few items that your house is broken into.
- Always lock your doors, even when inside your residence.

- To the extent possible, limit the number of persons who have keys to your residence.

Vehicular



- Always lock your car, even if you will be away from it for only a short period of time and never leave your engine running or leave keys in the car when unattended. Thieves are observant and quick.
- If the car has an alarm, use it. Buy a steering wheel “club”, or similar theft deterrent, and use it every time you leave the vehicle.
- When possible, park in a well lit, well traveled parking area, preferably with an attendant on duty.
- Never leave expensive items, or bags/packages in the passenger compartment of your car. Put them in the trunk before you park the car.
- When approaching your vehicle, especially at night and when parked on the street, be alert for anyone loitering in the area, or any suspicious objects or packages near or under your car. Have the door key or remote in hand before you get to your car door. If possible, take a quick walk around the

vehicle and look for any signs of tampering. Once inside, lock all doors.

General

- A little common sense goes a long way. Be aware of your surroundings at all times, particularly if you are standing in line. Be alert for people trying to divert your attention - while their partners attempt to steal your belongings.
- Keep purses, bags, backpacks closed and with you at all times. Items placed on the chair next to you, hung on the coat rack or placed behind you on the back of your chair are more easily stolen or pilfered than if you keep them in your lap or at your feet. To the extent possible, limit the amount of currency you carry. Carry the amount of currency necessary to make purchases during that day. Use your discretion on whether or not to carry credit cards as a majority of vendors do not accept them.

Sign up for SMS Security Alerts

In case of an urgent security alert, the Embassy can notify you by SMS text message. If you'd like to receive these messages, please email us your BIH cell phone number to rws@state.gov subject line “Add me to SMS”

Emergencies and Crisis

What the Department of State Can and Cannot Do in a Crisis



What is the Department of State's role during a crisis overseas? Do you always evacuate U.S. citizens during a crisis overseas?

The actions we take depend on the nature of the crisis. In some instances, we may only need to provide information on conditions in the country, such as warning about areas of unrest, how and where to seek help, and other useful advice. In more serious situations, we may recommend that U.S. citizens leave the foreign country, and, if commercial transportation is not available, provide departure assistance, as our resources permit.

What departure assistance do you provide? Why do you tell U.S. citizens they should leave, and then don't offer transportation?

The assistance we provide depends upon the nature of the crisis. Regularly scheduled commercial flights or transportation are always the best option when local communications and transportation infrastructure are intact and operating normally, even if we have advised all U.S. citizens to leave. Our efforts are devoted to keeping the local U.S. citizen community

informed of developments and travel options.

What happens during an evacuation?

Each evacuation depends on the nature of the crisis. In extreme situations, where local infrastructure is damaged or severely compromised, we work with the host government, other countries, and other U.S. government agencies to arrange chartered or non-commercial transportation for U.S. citizens seeking to depart. This could include transportation by air, land, or sea. While we partner closely with the Department of Defense, military options are only used as a last resort. You should not expect the U.S. military to assist you when we issue a Travel Warning advising you to leave a country.

Will the U.S. government pay for my travel? How much will it cost?

Departure assistance is expensive. U.S. law 22 U.S.C. 2671(b) (2) (A) requires that any departure assistance be provided "on a reimbursable basis to the maximum extent practicable." This means that evacuation costs are ultimately your responsibility; you will be asked to sign a form promising to repay the U.S. government. We charge you the equivalent of a full coach fare on commercial air at the time that commercial options cease to be a viable option. You will be taken to a nearby safe location, where the traveler will need to make his or her own onward travel arrangements. If you are destitute, and private resources are not available to cover the cost of onward travel, you may be eligible for emergency financial assistance.

What is Task Force Alert? How can I provide information about myself or my U.S. citizen friends and loved ones who are affected by a crisis overseas?

The best way to contact us during a major crisis overseas is via [Task Force Alert](#), a free service that allows U.S. citizens to enter information about themselves or their U.S. citizens' friends and loved ones into a database that we use to provide emergency consular assistance to U.S. citizens during a crisis. **This service does not automatically alert emergency medical or law enforcement officials.** U.S. citizens experiencing an emergency that requires immediate medical or law enforcement response should contact appropriate local responders. It is only applicable to U.S. citizens who are in the affected foreign country, and we do not collect information on people who are not U.S. citizens.

If my U.S. passport is expired, will you still assist me?

We strongly recommend that all U.S. citizens traveling or residing abroad keep their travel documents up-to-date. If your U.S. passport expires, you may be required to obtain a valid emergency travel document from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate before traveling. In some cases, we may need to take additional steps to determine your citizenship.

Help for American Victims of Crime Overseas



The State Department is committed to assisting American citizens who become victims of crime while abroad. We help in two ways:

- Overseas: consular officers, agents, and staff work with crime victims and help them with the local police and medical systems.
- In the United States: our office of Overseas Citizens Services will stay in touch with family members in the United States, and help provide U.S.-based resources for the victim when possible.

If you are a victim of crime overseas contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate. Contact the local police to report the incident and get immediate help. Request a copy of the police report.

When an American is the victim of a crime overseas, he or she may suffer from physical, emotional or financial injuries. It can be more difficult because the victim may be in unfamiliar surroundings, and may not know the local language or customs. Consuls, consular agents, and local employees at overseas posts know local government agencies and resources in the country where they work.

We can help:

- Replace a stolen passport
- Contact family, friends, or employers
- Obtain appropriate medical care
- Address emergency needs that arise as a result of the crime
- Explain the local criminal justice process
- Obtain information about your case
- Connect you to local and U.S. resources to assist victims of crime
- Obtain information about local and U.S. victim compensation programs
- Provide a list of local lawyers who speak English

We cannot:

- Investigate crimes
- Provide legal advice or represent you in court
- Serve as official interpreters or translators
- Pay legal, medical, or other fees for you

Some U.S. cities and communities offer programs help residents who are victims of overseas crime, including:

- Rape crisis counseling programs
- Shelter and counseling programs for battered women
- Support groups and bereavement counseling for members of murder victims
- Diagnostic and treatment programs for child abuse victims
- Assistance for victims of drunk driving crashes

Many U.S. states have victim compensation programs, and many offer benefits to residents who are

victims of violent crime overseas. Most programs require the victim to file a report at the time of the incident, and to provide a copy with the application. Programs include financial assistance to pay for:

- Medical costs
- Funeral expenses
- Lost income or loss of support

Information about each state's compensation program and how to apply for benefits is available from the [National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards](#)

Absentee Voting

Voting is a constitutional right that American citizens eighteen years and older can freely exercise. The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) covers all active-duty members of the Uniformed Services and their families, members of the merchant marine and their families, and US citizens who reside overseas, and assists them in exercising their right to vote.

Elections are managed individually by all 55 states and territories. This means that there are 55 sets of rules for absentee voting by UOCAVA citizens, but the basic steps are simple:

Citizens register to vote and request an absentee ballot by filling out the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA), and mailing it to their local election official in the state in which they are eligible to vote.

The election official approves/disapproves the FPCA or requests additional information.

If the FPCA is approved, the election official sends an absentee ballot to the citizen.

The citizen votes and returns their ballot to their election official by their state's deadline.

To successfully vote absentee, UOCAVA citizens should:

- Allow plenty of time to request, receive, and return their ballot.
- Notify their local election official each time their mailing address changes.
- Become familiar with their state's absentee voting laws, procedures, and deadlines to make sure their ballot is properly executed and will be counted.

If you wish to perform any of these tasks, go to www.fvap.gov and choose the "Get Started" button under the category of UOCAVA citizen that describes you.

The end of phrase "Warden Message"

The State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs is retiring the phrase "warden message." U.S. Embassies do continue to employ "wardens" as important local contacts and spot reporters in times of crisis. However, most embassies communicate directly with members of the local U.S. citizen community by e-mail and

text messages. These messages will now be divided into two categories:

-- "Message for U.S. Citizens" for routine but important messages such as voting news, outreach trip information, or newsletters.

-- "Emergency Message for U.S. Citizens" for breaking news messages containing advice for the resident community, such as those alerting U.S. citizens to demonstrations, a political crisis, a natural disaster, or a terrorist attack.

J-1 VISA

Exchange Visitor Program



Host families are as diverse as Americans themselves. If you and your family are willing to open yourselves to new experiences, share your lives with an extraordinary teenager from a foreign land, and provide guidance, love and support to a young person who is beginning his or her journey into adulthood, then you too, will be a great host family.

The first step in the process is to decide what type of participant you would like to host by visiting the [list of programs](#). Each program has an information page specifically targeted to hosts. The second step is contacting one of the [Designated Sponsors](#) for the chosen program. The Designated Sponsors are the

organizations that administer the exchange program and connect hosts with participants.

To learn more about hosting please visit <http://j1visa.state.gov/hosts-and-employers/host-families/experiences/>.

Want to avoid those long immigration lines in the U.S.?



Global Entry is a service put in place by the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) Agency. You can find these Global Entry kiosks in 20 major airports across the United States. Check out their website at www.globalentry.gov. Another advantage to having Global Entry is the opportunity to use special "APEC" or crew lines for other APEC economies. So, bypass those long immigration lines in the U.S. and other APEC countries and pursue being a Global Entry applicant. This Global Entry service is only available to American citizens. The fee is US\$100, requires a stateside appointment, fingerprinting, and persons age 14 and up are eligible to apply. Approved candidates are eligible to use this service for 5 years.

ASK THE CONSUL

Please email us your questions to rsu@state.gov and you may see your answer in the next issue of the Sentinel